



Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

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Memories that won't go away...

In the still of the night sleep does not come,
There's pain in my head, and pounding of heart.
I see, I hear, I feel their pain,
Back then, when the world seemed clearly insane.

In 1942, from the clear autumn sky
God looked down on us, not blinking an eye.
They were caught like stray dogs, and loaded on trucks,
Mothers, fathers, little babies, and scared tiny tots,
Wishing to know what their big crime was
They well could tell where the road led to:
To the place called "PIATYDNIE", they so well knew.
The place where mass graves stood empty and big,
Just a few weeks earlier, Jews were ordered to dig.

Mothers looking at children with apologizing eyes,
"Sorry my little ones" seemed spelling their sighs.

The one way journey soon came to an end,
Facing the beast-man-made craters,
Knowing well what they meant.
"Hurry up" they roared, "Jump in, you pigs,"
Nineteen thousand this time must fill these digs.
Lucky were those quickly shot and dead,
The others drowned slowly in a blood filled bed.

Mission accomplished - POGROM #1 - GREAT SUCCESS!
And two months later #2 will progress.
Six thousand only, a task easy next time,
With perfect planning, will take place right on time.
Same trucks, same route, destination well known,
To the thought of death, accustomed they've grown.
Their fate was sealed, no chance to redress,

POGROM #2 - YET ANOTHER SUCCESS.
One thousand were left, but for only one year
To produce for the Germans their much needed gear.
After one year and one month to be precise,
The thousand's fate was no surprise.
One town reached "perfection" with "JUDEN REIN"
The Nazis were gloating with genuine pride.

And this took place in my home town WLODZIMIERZ.
From Polish towns, like mine, for one,
The Jews were wiped out, and forever gone.

It was painful for me to write this piece,
But I felt I had placed at their graves a wreath...

Easy sleep will never come,
For I can't forget and overcome...

Mania Lichtenstein
(A Survivor)

THE LITTLE BROWN SHOE.

FAR REMOVED FROM OUR CITY, IN A DESERTED PLACE, TWO MASS GRAVES STOOD SILENT. THEY WERE DUG EARLIER BY JEWS, MANY OF WHOM NEVER HELD A SHOVEL IN THEIR HANDS. BUT, UNDER THE WATCHFUL EYES OF THE GERMANS, IN SWEAT AND EXHAUSTION, THE PROJECT WAS COMPLETED.

ONE BIG GRAVE TO CONTAIN 19,000 BODIES AND A SMALLER ONE FOR 6,000. THE FIRST POGROM CAME AND 19,000 BODIES WERE READY TO FILL ONE GRAVE. TWO MONTHS LATER THE SECOND POGROM PRODUCED 6,000 MORE. SO FAR THE PLAN WAS WORKING. ALL WAS SO QUIET. NO MORE WILL TUMULTOUS WAILING, CRYING, MOANING BE HEARD, LIKE WHEN THEY WERE JUMPING INTO THE GRAVES TO BE SHOT.

BUT, SOMETHING WENT WRONG. THE JEWISH BLOOD BEGAN REBELLING. THERE WAS NOT ENOUGH SPACE FOR IT, IN THOSE CRAMMED GRAVES. IT BURST LOOSE AND A 'RED SEA' EMERGED. AT THAT TIME ONLY A THOUSAND YOUNG JEWS REMAINED IN A SMALL GHETTO, KEPT TO BE USED FOR CLEANING UP ALL DIRTY JOBS, LIKE THAT ONE FOR INSTANCE. EQUIPPED WITH SHOVELS, WE WERE ORDERED TO ERADICATE THAT SPOOKY SITE, TO COVER UP AND ERASE ANY EVIDENCE.

THEY WERE NOT WORRIED ABOUT US BEARING WITNESS, FOR WE TOO WILL BE SILENCED IN A COUPLE OF MONTHS.

AS I WAS APPROACHING THE GRAVES, MY EYES CAUGHT A LITTLE BROWN SHOE, TRAMPPLED INTO THE GROUND BY THOUSANDS OF FEET. ALL CLOTHING OF THE VICTIMS, WERE A LONG WHILE AGO, BROUGHT BACK TO THE GHETTO FOR US TO ASSORT, BEFORE BEING SENT OFF TO GERMANY. ONLY ONE LITTLE BROWN SHOE OF A CHILD OF THREE OR FOUR, WAS LEFT BEHIND. PERHAPS TO BE A REMINDER OF HUMAN AUTROCITIES, THAT TOOK PLACE AT THAT FORSAKEN SITE. THE IMAGE OF THAT LITTLE BROWN SHOE OFTEN COMES TO MY MIND. I LIKE TO CALL IT 'THE LITTLE MONUMENT'.

THE ONLY MONUMENT.

1942 -- A Flashback.

Memories - Why must they keep coming back? I sometimes forget what I did yesterday, yet things that happened years ago keep flashing before my eyes. If they could only be rinsed away with the tears that they cause! The fact remains, they constantly come back filling my heart with too much sadness.

I keep these thoughts to myself. Why upset or maybe bore others with something they can't even relate to. Here you come in, my dear paper and pen... I am grateful to the specially designed paper and the "Aladdin" that make it possible for me to write. You "listen" when I open my heart; it helps me a bit.

Today I had a flashback of 1942. The years that followed were not in any way easier. Robbed of feelings, as if in a comatose state, all I wanted was for this nightmare to be over. Come what may!

Today my thoughts go back to September 1, 1942. The first chapter of the infamous extermination of our Ghetto. At 6:00 A.M., when the first shots rang out, I found myself separated from my family. Caught off guard, in panic, I followed some people to an attic where we spent 15 days, the duration of the first Pogrom! Since this happened in an instant, no food or drink was brought in. In a squatting position, trying as far as possible to distance oneself from the extremely hot tin roof we motionlessly waited, hardly uttering a word.

The search was intense. The stomping of the Nazi boots on the roof as they were looking for their "Precious Prey" was expoding our nerves. Not for an instant did anybody think of or desire food. WATER..... this was another thing! One can only imagine what lack of water can do to a person! Some started losing their mind and began acting irrationally. On the 8th day of dryness, getting a drink of water became a must. One of us crawled out of hiding to get a dish of rain water from one of the balconies because there was no running water in this building. That sip of stale water would not be forgotten for many years to come. WATER -- the most precious jewel in life.

In the meantime looking through the spaces between the boards of the attic, I watched the flames from the Ghetto, where my family was. It was no use fooling myself. It was not hard to guess their fate. They had already joined the 19,000, destined to perish in this Pogrom. The prepared mass graves had already swallowed the flesh and blood of innocent men, women, and little ones. The clothes they had to remove before being murdered had surely more value to the Nazis than Jewish lives.

It took two more Pogroms after this one, to eliminate the 26,000 Jews living in my hometown. "Juden Rein" -- clean of Jews, was their "noble cause." People sometimes say, don't dwell on the past. Easy said, I can't though I try. The flashbacks will happen forever!!

By Mania Lichtenstein
August 23, 1998

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

AFTER THE THIRD DAY OF LABORING IN THE WHEAT FIELDS, THE TRUCKS FINALLY BROUGHT US BACK TO ONE OF THE TWO EXISTING GHETTOS.

IT WAS NOT THE ONE MY FAMILY LIVED IN. IT WAS LATE IN THE EVENING, AND I WAS VERY ANXIOUS TO RETURN HOME. MY PLEADING WITH THE GUARDS AT THE GHETTO GATES TO LET ME GO HOME, WAS TO NO AVAIL. THEY KNEW OUR END WAS NEAR, WHY BOTHER...

GIVEN THE MOOD OF THAT NIGHT, I COULD EASILY SENSE HOW VERY WORRIED MY FAMILY WAS. NOT RETURNING HOME MEANT ONLY ONE THING TO THEM: I WAS ALREADY DEAD. HOW COULD THEY ENDURE IT?

THAT TRAGIC, SLEEPLESS NIGHT WAS WITNESSED AND RELATED TO ME BY A NEIGHBOR WHO SURVIVED THAT FIRST POGROM.

IT SEEMED THAT EVERYBODY "COULD SEE" AN INVISIBLE SIGN, ANNOUNCING OUR APOCALYPSE.

TO THE CONTRARY OF MY FAMILY'S BELIEF, I WAS NOT DEAD, BUT WITHIN HOURS THEY WERE. WHAT HAPPENED THERE WAS AS FOLLOWS:

WHEN IN AN UNEXPECTED MOMENT THE GERMANS AMBUSHED THEIR GHETTO, PANIC AND CHAOS ENSUED. THE INSTINCT TELLS ONE TO HIDE, BUT WHERE? THOSE PRIMITIVE HOUSES HAD NO SECRET PLACES.

THE ONLY POSSIBLE PLACE WAS THE ATTIC. NORMALLY THAT PLACE WOULD BRING BACK THE FONDEST MEMORIES. AS KIDS THE ATTIC WAS OUR PRIVATE HAVEN, WHERE WE PLAYED FOR HOURS. THE OUTSIDE LADDER LEADING TO IT SEEMED TO HAVE A HUNDRED STEPS.

IN A HURRY, MY FATHER, MOTHER, MY OLDEST SISTER RIVKA AND MY GRANDMOTHER WHO WAS BLIND, SCALED THOSE STEPS AND ENTERED THE ATTIC. AT THE MOMENT OF THE AMBUSH, MY MIDDLE SISTER NECHAMKA, WAS AT A NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE, AND HAD NO CHANCE TO RUN BACK. ALL IN THAT HOUSE HID SOMEWHERE NEAR A STOVE, FROM WHICH DEADLY FUMES WERE ESCAPING, AND AS A RESULT, ALL SUCCUMBED TO ASPHIXIATION.

NO SOONER HAD THE REST OF THE FAMILY ENTERED THE ATTIC, THEIR HEARTS STILL POUNDING, WHEN THE HEAVY STEPS OF THEIR HUNTERS' BOOTS WERE HEARD ASCENDING THE LADDER. THE LOUD BARKING ORDERS TO COME OUT WERE QUICKLY OBEYED. SCARED AND SHAKY THEY WERE COMING DOWN. IT WAS NOT EASY. ESPECIALLY FOR MY GRANDMOTHER. MY FATHER PRACTICALLY HAD TO CARRY HER DOWN. THEY WERE ORDERED TO CLIMB UNTO CATTLE TRUCKS ALREADY FILLED TO CAPACITY. THEY KNEW WELL THEIR DESTINATION. THEY ARRIVED AT THE READY MASS GRAVES. AND STRIPPED OF THEIR CLOTHES AND DIGNITY THEY WERE SWALLOWED BY THEM. I DEAL MUCH EASIER WITH MY OWN HORRID EXPERIENCES, THAN WITH THEIRS. AFTER ALL I SURVIVED, ONLY DUE TO MERE FATE.

PERHAPS IT WAS PROVIDENCE... SOMEONE HAD TO TELL THE WORLD ABOUT IT. I CANNOT STOP RELIVING THEIR ANGUISH AND PAIN.

JUNE 14, 2000

UNFORGETTABLE IMAGES.

ANOTHER DREADFUL, SLEEPLESS NIGHT. MY BODY BEGGED FOR SLEEP, BUT MY MIND, OVERLOADED WITH IMAGES, WOULD NOT COOPERATE.

I KNEW THAT NIGHT THAT THE FOLLOWING DAY, I WILL HAVE TO WRITE ABOUT IT, IN HOPE THAT THE WRITTEN WORDS WILL EXPUNGE SOME OF THAT PAIN IT WAS CAUSING ME. IT SOMETIMES DOES. MY EYESIGHT IS VERY POOR, YET IN THE DARK OF THE NIGHT IT LACKS NOTHING. IF I COULD HAVE ONLY CONVINCED MYSELF THAT IT WAS A TERRIBLE DREAM, THAT WILL PASS. REPEATEDLY, IMAGES OF NAKED BODIES OF MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN, MOVE BEFORE MY EYES. LIKE A HERD OF ANIMALS, BEING POKED AND PRODDED, MADE TO HURRY AND JUMP INTO A BLOODY ABYSS.

'SCHNELL' THE EXECUTIONERS YELLED. THAT AREA HAD TO BE QUICKLY VACATED FOR THE NEXT HERD OF NAKED BODIES. FACING THE MASS GRAVES, THE SIZE OF WHICH THE WORLD HAS NEVER SEEN BEFORE, THEY JUMPED. I COULD HEAR THE PANIC STRICKEN VOICES, THE SHRIEKS AND MOANS, AND THE CRYING OF THE CHILDREN. HOW WAS I TO SLEEP?..

19,000 PERISHED IN THAT FIRST POGROM. AMONG THEM WERE MY FATHER, MY MOTHER, MY GRANDMOTHER, MY SISTERS, COUSINS, AUNTS AND UNCLES, THE ENTIRE NEIGHBORHOOD. THE REMAINING TOWN'S JEWS FOLLOWED THE SAME ROUTE, TWO MONTHS LATER. ONLY 1000 YOUTHS, I AMONG THEM, WERE KEPT IN A SMALL GHETTO FOR ANOTHER YEAR. THERE WERE MANY TASKS WE WERE USED FOR. AFTER ONE YEAR, ELIMINATING THE 1000, THE SUCCESSFUL PROJECT OF 'JUDEN REIN' WAS ACCOMPLISHED.

ONE INCIDENT KEEPS CREEPING BACK TO MY MIND, AND STILL HURTS. DURING ONE OF OUR FORCED LABOR TASKS, HERR KELLER, OUR SUPERVISOR, TO ADD INSULT TO INJURY, BOASTINGLY PROCLAIMED:

'I MYSELF SHOT OVER 8000 JEWS, RECEIVING 30 PFENNIG PER HEAD' WE WERE SO DEGRADED AND SHOWED NO REACTION. DEEP DOWN IT HURT A LOT. WRITING AND RELIVING PAINFUL MEMORIES IS HARD, BUT IT IS ALSO THERAPEUTIC FOR ME. MAYBE SLEEP WILL COME EASIER TONIGHT.

MANIA LICHTENSTEIN

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THESE ARE THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH
CONDUCTED BY THE COMMITTEE ON THE
MORALITY OF THE ARMY AND NAVY
IN THE YEAR 1911. THE RESULTS
WILL BE PUBLISHED IN THE
MONTH OF JANUARY, 1912.

TENDER REFLECTIONS AMIDST DARK DAYS

THIS SHEET OF PAPER BEFORE ME, PEN IN HAND, MY LOW-VISION-AID MACHINE IS ON, AND I AM READY TO POUR MY HEART OUT. YET I HALT AND REFLECT, SHOULD I? SO MANY TIMES IN THE PAST I WAS ASKED, RATHER CRITICALLY, "WHY DO YOU WRITE, WHY LIVE IN THE PAST?" THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE MIGHT ANSWER SUCH A QUESTION.

LIKE A RAISED DAM WOULD RELEASE SHEETS OF GUSHING WATER, SO DOES MY MIND, AFTER YEARS OF SUPPRESSED MEMORIES, SETS LOOSE MANY THOUGHTS IMPOSSIBLE TO FORGET. YES! I'LL CONTINUE WRITING AS LONG AS I CAN. WHAT PROMPTED ME TO WRITE THIS TIME ARE TWO INCIDENTS, WHICH TO THIS DAY MAKE MY EYES ~~SWELL~~ WELL UP WITH TEARS, WHEN THINKING OF THEM.

ONE RELATES TO MY GRANDMOTHER, THE OTHER TO A NOBLE ELDERLY MAN. AFTER MORE THAN ONE YEAR BEHIND BARBED WIRES, WE IN OUR GHETTO REACHED THE LIMIT OF ENDURANCE AND OUR FOOD SUPPLY. NO NEW SOURCES WERE EXISTING. EVERYBODY FELT HUNGRY.

FOR THE LAST THREE DAYS BEFORE THE EXTERMINATION WOULD BEGIN, A SELECTION OF HUNDREDS OF YOUNG WOMEN TOOK PLACE. I AND THE OTHERS WERE TO HARVEST IN THE FIELDS. THE JOB SO ALIEN TO US, WE LEARNED QUICKLY, DUE TO THE GERMAN OVERSEERS SWIFT WHIP. ON THE THIRD DAY, PRIOR TO LEAVING FOR WORK, MY GRANDMOTHER, WHOM I LOVED DEARLY, HANDED ME A TINY, SOUR PICKLE SOMEBODY GAVE TO HER. SHE KNEW THERE WAS NOTHING ELSE I CAN TAKE ALONG. SHE INSISTED I TAKE IT. IT MOVED ME GREATLY, FOR I REALIZED THAT SHE, TOO, WAS HUNGRY. ONE MIGHT SAY, "WHAT BANALITY- A PICKLE!" A MINISCULE, TINY PICKLE COULD TASTE SO GOOD WHEN NOTHING ELSE IS AVAILABLE. TO ME THAT SELFLESS ACT WAS A TOKEN OF HER LOVE FOR ME. I REMEMBER IT WITH TENDERNESS.

I WAS NEVER TO SEE HER AGAIN, NOR ANY MEMBER OF MY FAMILY. OUR APOCALYPSE HAD BEGUN. AFTER THE THIRD DAY OF WORK ENDED, WE WERE BROUGHT BACK TO ONE OF THE TWO EXISTING GHETTOS. IT WAS NOT THE ONE WHERE MY FAMILY LIVED. FORBIDDEN TO CROSS OVER TO OUR GHETTO, I HAD TO FIND SHELTER FOR THE NIGHT WITH MY SISTER'S IN-LAWS. THE NEXT DAY AT 6 A.M., THE FIRST POGROM BEGAN, WHICH LASTED FIFTEEN DAYS. CAUGHT BY THE SUDDEN AMBUSH, ALL IN THAT BUILDING RAN TO HIDE IN ITS ATTIC. WE FELT LIKE BEING FRIED UNDER THE EXTREMELY HOT TIN ROOF. WE HAD NO FOOD OR WATER. FOR THE FIRST FEW DAYS, NIBBLING ON RAW POTATOES SUSTAINED US. IN LATER DAYS FOOD WAS NOT EVEN DESIRED. TODAY I FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE, BUT IT IS TRUE. THE LACK OF WATER BECAME OUR MAJOR PROBLEM. TO SURVIVE WITHOUT IT WAS INCONCEIVABLE. NOT

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KNOWING HOW MUCH LONGER THAT HUMAN HUNT MIGHT LAST, WE WERE ALREADY DRIED UP TO HALF OUR WEIGHT. WE BEGAN TO WONDER IF THE END OF OUR LIFE WOULD FEEL EASIER. IT WAS THE EIGHTH DAY OF THE POGROM, THE HORRID NOISES FROM OUTSIDE SUBSIDED A LITTLE. THE DESIRED NUMBER OF 19,000 JEWS WAS ALMOST REACHED. IT BECAME MUCH MORE QUIET THAN IN THE EARLIER DAYS. REMEMBERING A DISH WITH RAINWATER ON ONE OF THE BALCONIES WAS TOO TEMPTING TO IGNORE. ONE TOOK THE RISK TO GO OUT AND GET IT. THE SAFE RETURN AND THAT DISH OF STALE RAIN WATER WAS NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN.

WE ALL HAD A TURN TO GET A FEW SIPS OF THAT LIFE SAVING DELICACY. WHEN MY SISTER'S FATHER-IN-LAW WAS TO HAVE HIS FEW SIPS, HE REFUSED AND IN A HARDLY AUDIBLE VOICE WHISPERED, "LET THE CHILDREN HAVE IT," NAMELY I AND A NIECE OF HIS. HE INSISTED AND WE DRANK HIS SHARE. I WISH WE HADN'T, FOR THOSE FEW SIPS OF WATER COULD HAVE SAVED THAT KIND MAN'S LIFE. WE HAD NO MORE WATER TO DRINK UNTIL THE FIFTEENTH DAY OF OUR ORDEAL.

19,000 JEWS WERE CAUGHT, SHOT, AND BURIED IN MASS GRAVES THAT WERE DUG EARLIER. TWO MONTHS LATER, SIX THOUSAND MORE FOLLOWED. ALL OF OUR TOWN'S JEWS WERE DEAD, BUT FOR ONE THOUSAND. FOR ONE YEAR WE PROVIDED FOR THE GERMANS ANY TASKS THEY REQUIRED. AFTER ONE YEAR, THE INEVITABLE END CAME.

AFTER THE FIRST -15 DAYS- POGROM, OUR GROUP FROM THE ATTIC EMERGED. SKELETON-LIKE BUT ALIVE. IF ONLY FOR THE MEANTIME, WE HELD ON BEWILDERED. IT WAS NOT SO FOR MY SISTER'S FATHER-IN-LAW. HE EMERGED, BUT A DAY LATER HE QUIETLY SUCCUMBED. DEHYDRATION TOOK ITS TOLL. HE SACRIFICED HIS FEW SIPS OF WATER, SO WE, THE CHILDREN, WOULD HAVE A BETTER CHANCE TO SURVIVE. I WILL ALWAYS CHERISH THE MEMORY OF THAT FINE, GENTLE MAN.

FOR ME, AND THOSE LIKE ME, IT IS QUITE HARD TO ERASE THE MEMORIES OF THOSE DARK, HARD TO IMAGINE EXPERIENCES.

MANIA LICHTENSTEIN
10-26-2002

